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### **PRESS RELEASE**

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## **Senators file *Deaf Child's Bill of Rights Act***



ATLANTA – State Sen. Preston Smith (R-Rome) and Sen. Gloria Butler (D-Stone Mountain) filed legislation today to enact the *Deaf Child's Bill of Rights Act*, to require local school systems to take into account the specific communications needs of hearing impaired students and to guarantee that deaf students are instructed in whatever communication mode or language is deemed necessary – such as sign language, oral, aural or with visual signs or clues.

Senate Bill 168 is the first part of a duo of bills Sen. Smith and Sen. Butler have introduced to benefit children in the Georgia School for the Deaf in Cave Spring, which is located in Sen. Smith's district, and the Atlanta Area School for the Deaf located in Clarkston, as well as children currently enrolled in Georgia's public school systems across Georgia.

"Many deaf or hard-of-hearing children lack any significant language skills and it is essential for the well-being and growth of deaf and hard-of-hearing children that our public educational programs recognize the unique nature of deafness and ensure that all deaf and hard-of-hearing children have the appropriate, ongoing and fully accessible educational opportunities as their hearing counterparts," Sen. Smith said.

The bill stipulates that no deaf or hard-of-hearing students will be denied the opportunity for instruction in a particular mode or language solely because the child has some remaining hearing, the

child's parent or guardian is not fluent in the communication mode or language being taught, or the child has previous experience with some other communication mode or language.

The companion legislation, Senate Bill 170 will allow students to fulfill the foreign language requirement for a college preparatory diploma with American Sign Language – the preferred language used by the deaf community in the United States.

“American Sign Language is a complete, complex language that employs signs made with the hands and other movements, including facial expressions and postures of the body,” Sen. Butler said. “It is the first language of many deaf North Americans, and one of several communication options available to deaf people. ASL is said to be the fourth most commonly used language in the United States behind English, Spanish and French.”



In recent years, a number of states have passed legislation recognizing American Sign Language (ASL) as a foreign language and permitting high schools and universities to accept it in fulfillment of foreign language requirements for hearing as well as deaf students. Many community colleges and universities including Brown, Georgetown, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Purdue, and the University of Washington, accept ASL as a foreign language for academic or elective credit.

In Georgia, American Sign Language has been accepted as a foreign language in limited circumstances: for deaf students as one unit elective credit and for other students as the third unit of foreign language credit. American Sign Language is taught in several colleges both for credit and non-credit.

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*Sen. Preston Smith serves as Chairman of the Judiciary Committee. He represents the 52<sup>nd</sup> Senate District which includes Floyd County and portions of Bartow and Gordon counties. He may be reached by phone at 404.656.0034 or by e-mail at [preston.smith@senate.ga.gov](mailto:preston.smith@senate.ga.gov).*

*Sen. Gloria Butler serves as Deputy Minority Whip. She represents the 55<sup>th</sup> Senate District which includes portions of DeKalb and Gwinnett counties. She may be reached by phone at 404.656.0075 or by e-mail at [gloria.butler@senate.ga.gov](mailto:gloria.butler@senate.ga.gov).*